

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6450

As of January 29, 2020

Title: An act relating to establishing the warm water fishing advisory group.

Brief Description: Establishing the warm water fishing advisory group.

Sponsors: Senators Padden, Salomon, Warnick and Short.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks: 1/28/20.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes a Warm Water Fishing Advisory Group (Advisory Group) consisting of representatives from recreational fishing and warm water advocacy groups.
- Directs the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to administer the Warm Water Game Fish Enhancement Program in consultation with the Advisory Group.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER, NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Jeff Olsen (786-7428)

Background: A Warm Water Game Fish Enhancement Program (Enhancement Program) was established in the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) in 1996. The Enhancement Program is designed to increase the opportunities to fish for warm water game fish including bass, catfish, crappie, walleye, and tiger musky. The Enhancement Program is designed to use a practical applied approach to increase warm water fishing. A portion of each freshwater and combination fishing license fee is deposited into the Warm Water Game Fish Account for the development of warm water pond and lake habitat, culture of warm water game fish, improvement of warm water fish habitat, management of warm water fish populations, and other practical activities that will improve warm water fishing. The WDFW must actively involve organized fish clubs in the development of the Enhancement Program.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Summary of Bill: WDFW must administer the Enhancement Program in consultation with the Advisory Group. WDFW must work with a designated representative chosen by the primary advocacy groups in Washington to form the first Advisory Group. WDFW and the representative shall cooperatively select the Advisory Group members. Those representatives and all future replacements must be determined by WDFW and must include members from recognized recreational fishing and warm water advocacy groups regardless of political affiliation. The Advisory Group must consist of no fewer than five and no more than nine members. Members shall also represent the various geographic areas of the state where warm water fishing occurs.

Yellow perch is added to the list of warm water species in the enhancement program. Largemouth bass is added to the list of species to be considered for fish culture under the Enhancement Program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Warm water fishing advocates want to get involved in the management of the warm water fishing program in Washington to increase fishing opportunities. There have been several changes to the limits on bass fisheries over the past few years, and the impacts of those changes on warm water fisheries are not fully understood. Since the removal of the limits, there has been a steady decline in the population, including the population of larger fish. Northern pike populations have increased, and there needs to be more science applied to understand the consequences of removing limits on warm water species. There are some suggested language changes that will be provided to clarify the membership on the advisory group. One goal of the program is to grow the sport of bass fishing including high school and collegiate teams. Expanding warm water fishing can improve the economy and promote outdoor activity.

CON: WDFW conducted a robust public involvement campaign recently with the changes to liberalize daily limits for bass and channel catfish in the anadromous waters of the state to assist with Orca recovery. WDFW suggests an ad hoc advisory committee with a broader group of stakeholders could be created to address issues, and recommends that legislation is not necessary to create a permanent group.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Mike Padden, Prime Sponsor; Craig Shaber, Inland Empire Bass Club; Joel Nania, Save Washington State Bass Fishing.

CON: Tom McBride, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife; Craig Burley, Deputy Director for Fish Program, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.